

I can also tell you that for Democrats, because we believe in activist Government, it's very important that we keep a certain number of innovative Governors coming into the U.S. Senate all the time, because they understand how this stuff works. And it's important that you have people from our part of the country elected to the Senate, so that we can defend it when we have to take tough votes on sensible gun safety measures, for example.

It's not a hard vote for people who have no significant rural voters, no significant percentage for getting the NRA mailings all the time. It'll be a hard vote for him. And he'll take it, and he'll do the right thing, but then he'll know how to defend it, which is very, very important.

So all these Senate races are very important this year. All these House races are important. But I want those of you who don't know Mel Carnahan to know you have an extraordinary opportunity here. I know this guy. He is a good man. He is a great friend. He was there with me when I was practically all alone and running fifth in the pools in New Hampshire. You want somebody that will stay hitched in the tough times and take a decision when it's not self-evidently the right thing to do.

He has been a fabulous Governor, and you heard him reel off the issues. I just want you to know this is a huge deal. These judicial votes today were just one example. Senator Ashcroft voted to kill the African-American State Supreme Court judge in Missouri, Ronnie White and, I believe, did not fairly represent his position as a judge on criminal justice issues.

But there is an honest division here. You don't have to hate anybody to take the other one's part. But of all the races we've got going, where we're trying to elect a new person to the Senate, this guy has a unique ability to make a contribution to the Senate, to the policies and the politics of the Senate that no one else does.

You did a good thing in coming here. I hope you'll ask other people to give to his campaign. I think he's going to win, and all of us need to do whatever we can to help him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:15 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Smith and Elizabeth Bagley, dinner hosts; Jean Carnahan, wife of Gov. Mel Carnahan and their daughter, Robin. Mel Carnahan is a candidate for the U.S. Senate in Missouri.

Remarks Announcing the Initiative To Reduce Air Travel Delays

March 10, 2000

Thank you very much. I want to thank Secretary Slater and Jane Garvey and the airline executives who are here, the representatives of the airline pilots, the air traffic controllers, and the other aviation leaders who have made a truly remarkable team for this announcement.

Minimum Wages Legislation

Before I talk about the air travel issue, because this is my only opportunity to meet with the press today, and because I had the unusual good fortune of letting them parade in ahead of us, here—I actually tried to get Mark Knoller [CBS Radio] to do this announcement, but he refused. *[Laughter]*

I want to say a few words about a very down-to-Earth issue, the proposal to raise the minimum wage. I have called for a simple one dollar increase in the minimum wage to help millions of families. Last night, dozens of Republicans joined us in forming a majority to raise the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years.

But unfortunately, the leadership turned that commonsense act into a dead letter by insisting they would only have a minimum wage increase if we turn back overtime protections for over a million workers and use the bill to give a large tax cut, which both disproportionately benefits the wealthiest Americans and would put our prosperity at risk by making it impossible for us to continue to pay down the debt and to save Social Security and Medicare.

Now, I think the American people question why Congress can't do something as simple as raising the minimum wage without loading it up with special favors. And I think it's a good question. The right answer is to send me a clean bill, a bill simple and clear, that could fit on one side of one piece of

paper. In fact, if you look at it, that's exactly what our minimum wage bill does. It's not very big, not very complicated. And I hope that we can pass it.

I'm looking forward to working with the Congress. I have not given up on this, and I have been given some encouraging signals that we might yet be able to reach an agreement. So I will keep working on it.

Air Travel Delays

Now, let me again welcome all the representatives of the transportation industry here. And let me say a special word of appreciation to Senator Jay Rockefeller for his longstanding leadership in this area and his interest. I think it's quite important that we have airline efficiency, because it's almost impossible for someone as tall as Senator Rockefeller to be comfortable on an airline—[*laughter*]*—*and we want to make sure he can at least always be on time. [*Laughter*] He has worked on this for a long time.

You mentioned, Secretary Slater mentioned the meeting we had in Everett, Washington. When I took office, the airline industry was in trouble. We've all worked very hard for the successes of the last 7 years, and all the actors in the industry have.

I'd also like to say a special word of appreciation to someone who is not here, Vice President Gore, who headed our Commission on Airline Safety and Security. It was part of our reinventing Government effort, and I thank him for his efforts, and all the people who worked on that endeavor.

We know that delays pile up as flights increase and thunderstorms snarl the skies. We know, with springtime coming, that we don't want to forget, as Rodney said, that last year's summer storms were the worst, or some of the worst, on record. The air traffic control system couldn't respond fast enough. More than 1,200 aircraft were late every day last summer. Delays rose by 22 percent last year overall. It's not good for travelers; it's not good for the airline industry; and it's not good for the overall economy.

Of course, when it comes to air travel, safety is the most important thing. In severe weather, flights will be canceled or delayed for safety reasons, and passengers wouldn't have it any other way. But as we work to

keep the travel as safe as it can be, we should also do everything we can to make it as efficient as it can be.

After last summer's record delays, the Federal Aviation Administration put together an extraordinary partnership—with the airline industry, the pilots, the workers who keep the planes in the air, the air traffic controllers who bring them home safe. Together, they developed a faster, more efficient response to storms. And they came here today to brief me on the improvements we can all expect this summer.

First, better communications will let pilots and passengers know promptly whether they can expect a delay measured in minutes or in hours. Second, centralized air traffic decisionmaking will let us respond better to the really big storms that can stretch the length of the east coast or from Houston to the Great Lakes. Third, new technology will help FAA and airline experts use airspace more efficiently, detect storms sooner, and keep runways working even in bad weather. Fourth, FAA and airline representatives will share information several times a day, working off the same state-of-the-art weather forecast. And finally, next month the FAA will open a web site with up-to-the-minute weather information for consumers.

I want to thank all the organizations represented here for working together. And I thank all the Members of Congress who have supported these reforms. Let me also mention that Congress is close to finalizing the FAA reauthorization bill. I know it's important to Secretary Slater, because he sent me a memo about it yesterday. [*Laughter*] This will provide ample funding to upgrade facilities and equipment at airports and air traffic control centers. If we want to minimize delays and maximize safety, we need this FAA reauthorization and this funding. I think everybody here who's done a lot of air travel knows that we need to upgrade the facilities and the equipment and the air traffic control centers.

But I am concerned that too little funding will be available for air traffic control operations. That's the bedrock of efficiency and safety. And although the bill contains some first steps forward, it doesn't go far enough toward the system-wide reform we need.

We must bring the air traffic control system and the way it's managed into the 21st century. We have the safest air travel in the world, but as more and more Americans take to the air, we need to make our system as efficient as it safe. The FAA expects passenger traffic to rise by more than 50 percent in the next 10 years. Freight traffic will almost double in the same period. Busier skies means we have to work harder to keep our skies safe and to keep planes flying on time.

So today I'm directing the FAA to develop a plan for broader reform of the air traffic control system and to report back to me in 45 days, building from fundamental principles. America's 21st century air traffic control system should provide 21st century high-tech service. The system must work better with its customers, the commercial airlines, and others who pay for the system. It must be able to look beyond next year's budget cycle and fund new technology we need over a multi-year period.

We must meet these challenges in a way that helps, not harms, everyone who is a part of the air traffic control system. And we must always keep safety at the top of our agenda. With other Government agencies and the private sector, I ask the FAA to look ahead to our ultimate goal, putting together a seamless, state-of-the-art system from coast to coast.

Now, until we work out a way to get Mother Nature to cooperate, storms, delays, and cancellations will always be with us. And the American people understand that. But they also understand that if we can photograph and analyze weather patterns from space, we ought to be able to tell passengers why they're delayed and for how long. If we can guide the space shuttle into orbit and back, we ought to be able to guide planes around thunderstorms safely.

We can do a better job. Starting next summer, with the help of everyone here today, we will. Again, let me say, Secretary Slater and to Jane Garvey and to all the people standing with me and all of you sitting out in the audience who had anything to do with this, this is the way our country ought to work in a lot of other contexts. I thank you for what you have done. I think we have to do more. But this summer a lot of people will

benefit from the enormous efforts you have made, and I am very, very grateful.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:21 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Statement on the United Negro College Fund's Technology Enhancement Capital Campaign

March 10, 2000

Today the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) announced the creation of its Technology Enhancement Capital Campaign, a technology initiative that will bring digital opportunity to historically black colleges across the Nation. Through a \$50 million contribution by Microsoft and key commitments from IBM and AT&T, UNCF will help empower students, faculty, and staff at all 39 UNCF member colleges by strengthening technology infrastructure and improving computer access. I applaud the creation of this partnership and strongly support the efforts behind it.

While computer and Internet access has exploded in recent years, America continues to face a "digital divide"—a gap between those who have access to information age tools and the skills to use them and those who don't. We cannot allow unequal access to deepen divisions along the lines of race, income, education level, and geography. I believe we can use technology to help make the American dream a reality for more citizens, and that is why I have made the effort to bring digital opportunity to all Americans a top administration priority.

My administration is committed to doing its part to ensure that all Americans benefit from opportunities created by information technology. But the Government can not and should not do this alone. That is why I will lead a new markets trip the week of April 9th—designed to mobilize significant private and public efforts to close the digital divide. Efforts like the Technology Enhancement Capital Campaign are inspiring examples of what can be done in partnership to meet this important goal.